

## REPORT OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL ROCK ART CONGRESS, IFRAO2018, 'STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS'

Angelo E. Fossati, IFRAO 2018 General Secretary \*

The 20th International Rock Art Congress, IFRAO2018, 'Standing on the Shoulders of Giants' (the title is a quote from the 11th century philosopher Bernard of Chartres), has been held in Darfo Boario Terme, Valcamonica, Italy, from the 29th August to the 2nd of September 2018. It has been one of the largest international rock art congresses ever organised, with around 800 people taking part in the congress, including speakers and attendees. There were 530 scientific papers distributed over 36 sessions using several rooms of the Congress Centre in Darfo Boario Terme and the nearby *Consolata-Centro Formativo Provinciale G. Zanardelli* School.

The organisation of a congress of this size cannot be improvised. Three years ago, as soon as our candidacy had been accepted during the IFRAO meeting at the 2015 Congress in Caceres, we started working on several fronts. An International Scientific Committee was immediately created which included active professional rock art scholars from different continents. The permanent organising committee (composed of the *Cooperativa Archeologica Le Orme dell'Uomo* and of the *Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici*, the organisers of the Congress) upon receiving the international scientific committee's choice of 36 sessions, had meetings practically every week. The positive response for participation exceeded our expectations and was due in part to the constant communication over several social and academic platforms, including international conferences, over the last three years. The reputation of Valcamonica's rock art within academic circles also played an important part in the popularity of the conference. This is reinforced by the field schools that have attracted thousands of scholars and students over the years who have come to the valley to study our research methods. Furthermore, the high standard of the international scientific committee, the interesting session topics and the diligent work of the session coordinators did the rest. However, people also came to see the rock art of Valcamonica, and this was evident in the number of people who attended the organised visits and by the number of independent visits to sites. The success of the Congress is also due to the excellent organisational direction of Tiziana Cittadini and the participation of dozens of volunteers from two local high schools (the *Istituto Scolastico Santa Dorotea Cocchetti di Cemmo* in Capo di Ponte and the *Liceo Golgi* in Breno) who provided constant assistance to the lecture rooms during the presentations. The congress attracted interest and surprise among the inhabitants of Valcamonica, due to the very high number of participants and the renown of the speakers. The hotels in

---

\* IFRAO President; *Cooperativa Archeologica Le Orme dell'Uomo*, Cerveno (BS); Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milano, Italy.



*Fig. 1 - Opening speech (photo M. Giorgi)*



*Fig. 2 - Masterly lesson on Cave art in Europe delivered by Jean Clottes (photo M. Giorgi)*

Boario were all full, and many even outside Boario. The congress assisted in elevating the community's perception of the heritage value of the rock art as well as its economic value.

The 36 sessions covered various topics. There were 'geographical' themed sessions, concerning rock art in different areas (North America, Scandinavia, the Alps, peninsular Italy, Mediterranean area, eastern Sahara, Middle East, Australia and desert landscapes) and 'chronological sessions' concerning specific periods (Palaeolithic, post-Palaeolithic and Historical periods). There was also an ample number of interpretative sessions (e.g. *Mens simbolica*, Symbolism of death, Modern reuses), and those that compared the objects depicted in rock art with real ones (Weaponry and tools in rock art) or information obtained from peoples living ethnographically with rock art (Rock art and ethnography, Colonisation rock art). Some sessions dealt with individual themes (Anthropomorphic images, Archaeo-acoustics, Statues-steles, Inscriptions in rock art, Pastoral graffiti, and Sex, drugs and rock and roll). There were also a number of 'scientific' sessions, i.e. those where advances in methods and techniques in the research of rock art were presented (Rupestrian archeology, Rock art science, Digital age, Pigments, 3D methodologies). Some sessions have been dedicated to conservation, enhancement and protection of sites with rock art and the various associated management challenges (Public policies, Managing sustainable rock art sites, Rock art and World Heritage). A session with numerous presentations was the History of rock art research, a prelude to two other meetings / workshops: one dedicated to the memory of the Australian researcher John Clegg and one in honour of Emmanuel Anati. In summing up the history of research themes at the congress I must also mention the masterly lesson on *Cave art in Europe* delivered by Jean Clottes, the best-known scholar of Palaeolithic caves in France, presented as the plenary lecture.

It would be implausible to list all the news that arose from the 36 sessions, given the 530 presentations. It should, however, be emphasised that all the sessions were very well attended: it was often difficult to find a place to sit down. Regarding the rock art from Valcamonica it is worth noting that the archaeological research in Valcamonica has been well represented by 40 presentations, spread over several sessions. For the most part these represented research on individual themes such as single rocks, on statue-steles, on inscriptions in the Camunian alphabet, on the management of sites, or on historical rock art, just to name a few. There was also a round table on the chronology of rock art in Valcamonica: this was a real innovation and certainly one of the most important results of the entire IFRAO2018 congress. For the first time in 21 years, researchers from the two major schools of research on Valcamonica rock art (the *Cooperativa Archeologica Le Orme dell'Uomo* and the *Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici*, which had their respective mentors in Emmanuel Anati and Raffaele de Marinis) gathered and discussed how to use common terminology to define the different phases in which petroglyphs appear. After a round table discussion that took place on the evening of the 29th of August we decided that, beginning with the next publications, we will all use a chronological serialisation that uses a shared terminology. A great result for the progress of rock art studies in Valcamonica.



Fig. 3 - Visit to the National Park of Naquane, despite the strong rain (photo A.E. Fossati)



Fig. 4 - Visit to the Sottolaiolo's rock-art (photo M. Giorgi)

There were several additional, associated events, all of which were very well attended: guided tours both during the day and at night to various rock art sites (Naquane, Luine, Foppe di Nadro, Seradina, Bedolina, In Valle, Dos Sottolajolo), concerts (event organised by the District Valle Camonica Cultural), slide shows of photographs (Places of peace and power), a film screened at the headquarters (The origins) and off-site (Alps at Edolo). Five exhibitions were held at the Congress venue: *Stone images. Rock art the first global expression*, a photographic exhibition dedicated to world rock art; *Symbols. Valcamonica rock art images within the casts of Battista*



Fig. 5 - Exhibitions (photo M. Giorgi)

*Maffessoli*, an exhibition of some plaster casts made in the second half of the 20th century by the famous carpenter-artist Battista Maffessoli; *Visions on stone. Rock art of the Columbia Plateau, U.S.A.*, by the Oregon Archaeological Society, about the rock art of Native Americans living on the Columbia River in north-western United States; *Mont Bego: casts of the rock engravings*, an exhibition with casts and photographs of the petroglyphs of Mount Bego organised by the Departmental Museum of Tende (France). Finally, the exhibition *Contemporary rock art* by Yang Cai, an artist-scientist, professor at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania, U.S.A.).

At the end of the Congress there were two official meetings: the ICOMOS-CAR (International Council on Monuments and Sites - Rock Art Committee) and the IFRAO Business Meeting where the representatives of some member associations attending the Congress participated. At the end of the latter meeting I have been appointed as the next IFRAO President. There are several points that I raised in my speech at the inauguration ceremony for the Congress, a type of agenda that I would like to follow. I think one of the most important points will be the focus on schools. I would like to circulate, to all the IFRAO association members, a document with a number of suggestions for directions associated with schools: i.e. improve the visibility of rock art in textbooks; organise student groups to visit public rock art sites; establish conferences and rock art exhibits especially dedicated to school students. This will not only assist in improving the understanding of rock art but also its conservation as well as highlighting its importance as heritage. I think that more effort needs to be directed to popularising rock art within the associated communities and improving the accessibility and communication of scientific rock art research.

A few words of thanks to:

Scientific Coordinators: Mila Simões de Abreu and Andrea Arcà;

General Coordinator: Tiziana Cittadini;

Immediate-Past IFRAO President: Hipolito Collado Giraldo;

IFRAO Convener: Robert G. Bednarik;

Members of the scientific commission: André Prous, Andrea Arcà, Angelo E. Fossati, Bansi Lal Malla, Claire Smith, Fidelis Masao, Guillermo Munoz, James D. Keyser, Jean Clottes, Jean Lœic Le Quellec, Jo McDonald, José Julio Garcia Arranz, Maria Giuseppina Ruggiero, Mila Simões de Abreu, Paul Taçon, Valerie Feruglio;

Secretary: Nives Pezzoni;

Editing: Valeria Damioli, Marisa D. Giorgi, Ludwig Jaffe;

Logistic and reception: Paolo Medici, DMO;

Ceremonial, communication and relations with the international organisations: Roberta Alberotanza;

Communication: Valeria Damioli with the support of Explora.

We also wish to thank these relevant organisations that gave support to the IFRAO2018 Congress: Finanziaria di Vallecamonica SPA, Fondazione CARIPLO, UBI BANCA, Forge Fedriga, Fondazione ASM.

The IFRAO2018 Congress was held under the auspices and the participation of: Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali, 2018 Anno Europeo del Patrimonio Culturale, ICOMOS, ICCROM, Regione Lombardia, Provincia di Brescia, Comune di Darfo Boario Terme, Distretto Culturale di Valle Camonica, la Valle dei Segni, Consorzio Comuni BIM di Vallecamonica, Comunità Montana di Vallecamonica, Gruppo Istituzionale di Coordinamento del sito UNESCO n. 94 Arte rupestre della Valle Camonica.

A big thank you to the staff members both of the Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici and of the Cooperativa Archeologica Le Orme dell'Uomo, whose names would be too many to list here, for all the help provided during the five days of the Congress.